Great American Public Libraries: The 2003 HAPLR Rankings

The nation's public libraries are once again assessed and ranked

by Thomas J. Hennen Jr.

As I noted in my March 2003 *American Libraries* article, "Performing Triage on Budgets in the Red" (p. 36–39), the wider economy has a major impact on library performance and ratings. The recession began in March 2001, and the attacks of September 11 later that year added to the problems of communities and libraries everywhere; however, because of the lag in reporting cycles those events are not yet reflected in the latest edition of Hennen's American Public Library Ratings (HAPLR).

The data on which this edition is based is that reported by libraries in 2002 for activities in 2001. Libraries such as Denver Public and Oregon's Multnomah County, which have consistently scored high in these ratings, do so again. However, the widely publicized budget cuts and service reductions at those institutions are likely to have substantial negative effects on future ratings.

Use is up, patrons pleased

As noted in ALA Library Fact Sheet Number 6 (www.ala.org/library/fact6.html), two recent studies demonstrated that economic recessions increase library use, that Americans are pleased with their library services, and that they would be willing to pay more for those services.

Ours is a countercyclical industry: up when the economy is down, flat or falling when the economy is up. It takes a while for budget cuts or increases to affect library use, and it takes even more time for those changes to be reflected in reported statistics. It is highly likely that library-use rates will continue to climb, though not forever, even as the funding levels dip because of state and local budget crises.

Librarians have been calling for the inclusion of measures of electronic services since the first edition of the HAPLR ratings in 1999 (*AL*, Jan. 1999, p. 72–76), but the data to do so is still not sufficiently available. The tables on p. 45 indicate averages and per capita comparisons for those libraries measuring electronic use, but the averages do not tell the whole story.

The Federal-State Cooperative Service (FSCS), which gathers the data on which HAPLR is based, has been working on including electronic use for a number of years, but this edition of the dataset is the first in which enough libraries included the data to meet the NCES requirement for publication (an 80% response rate). That data is reported as electronic uses per typical week, but the agency plans to annual-

Structure of the HAPLR Rating Scores

The HAPLR scores are based on six input and nine output measures. Each factor is weighted and then scored. Only libraries serving comparably sized populations are compared with one another. The author adds the scores for each library within a population category to develop a weighted score in each population category. A 95th-percentile score for all 15 measures would give the library a score at the top of its population category and a score of 950. A fifth-percentile score for all measures would put the library at the bottom with a score of 50. Most scores are between 250 and 750. Further details on the rating methods are available on the author's website.

Libraries Reporting Electronic Use in 2001

This is the first year that FSCS has reported electronic resource use. This chart demonstrates electronic-use reporting by libraries in 2001. About 80% of libraries nationwide reported electronic use according to the definitions agreed to by the state data coordinators and the FSCS. Many more libraries in fact provide access to electronic resources but are not able to report that use in the form required by FSCS.

Population Category	Number of Libraries	Percent of Libraries
Over 500,000	47	62%
250,000–499,999	57	60%
100,000–249,999	234	72%
50,000–99,999	418	77%
25,000–49,999	738	81%
10,000–24,999	1,449	82%
5,000–9,999	1,195	83%
2,500–4,999	1,075	82%
1,000–2,499	1,285	79%
Under 1,000	793	76%
Combined	7,291	80%

Average Expenditures Per Circulation and Electronic Use

This table compares direct-collection expenditures and electronic-use expenditures at the 7,291 libraries that report electronic-use information. Electronic resources include, but are not limited to, Internet (Web, e-mail, telnet, other), online indexes, CD-ROM reference sources, software, and the online catalog.

Population Category	Total Annual Electronic Resource Uses	Total Annual Circulation	Collection Expenditure Per Electronic Use	Collection Expenditure Per Circulation
Over 500,000	57,425,888	286,777,918	$0.81	$0.66
250,000–499,999	21,822,008	118,157,546	$0.94	$0.51
100,000–249,999	29,117,296	200,814,357	$1.10	$0.45
50,000–99,999	29,346,668	175,284,157	$0.93	$0.43
25,000–49,999	23,695,464	163,970,570	$1.02	$0.46
10,000–24,999	23,178,376	163,556,526	$0.99	$0.42
5,000–9,999	7,864,896	62,680,936	$1.00	$0.43
2,500–4,999	3,801,408	28,384,346	$0.80	$0.43
1,000–2,499	2,387,632	17,300,621	$0.95	$0.43
Under 1,000	757,276	4,473,932	$0.85	$0.46
Combined	199,396,912	1,221,400,909	$0.94	$0.50

Per Capita Comparisons

This table compares the per-capita electronic use rates to the more traditional measures of reference, visits, and circulation in the 7,291 libraries reporting electronic use.

Population Category	Electronic Resource Use	Reference	Visits	Circulation
Over 500,000	1.2	1.6	4.1	6.1
250,000–499,999	1.1	1.1	3.9	6.3
100,000–249,999	0.8	0.9	3.9	6.0
50,000–99,999	1.0	0.8	4.2	6.4
25,000–49,999	0.9	0.8	4.7	6.7
10,000–24,999	1.0	0.8	5.1	7.2
5,000–9,999	0.9	0.8	4.9	7.2
2,500–4,999	1.0	0.8	4.7	7.3
1,000–2,499	1.1	0.9	5.0	8.0
Under 1,000	1.6	1.0	6.1	9.3
Combined	1.0	1.1	4.3	6.4

ize the numbers in the next edition to parallel all other data reporting. Further information is available on the Web at nces.ed.gov/pubs2003/2003398.pdf.

The following is how FSCS defines electronic usage:

> Count the number of users using electronic resources in the library in a typical week. Electronic resources include, but are not limited to, Internet (Web, e-mail, telnet, other), online indexes, CD-ROM reference sources, software, and the online catalog. Do not include staff use of these resources.
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> Note: The number of users may be counted manually, using registration logs. Count each user that uses electronic resources, regardless of the amount of time spent on the computer. A user who uses the library's electronic resources three times a week would count as three customers. Software such as "Historian" can also be used to track the number of users at each public terminal.

Examination of the data indicates huge library-by-library variations that I judge to be the result of differing interpretations of the definitions on electronic use from FSCS. As an example, while the average in all population categories hovers at about one use per person annually, the difference between the fifth and 95th percentiles can vary by a factor of 50- or 60-to-one! Surely there are differences between the availability of these resources, but that range seems to call for further clarification of the definitions and reporting requirements.

The available data is not yet complete enough for incorporation into the HAPLR ratings, but let's see what the statistics are beginning to indicate.

- Just 80%, or 7,291 libraries, reported electronic resources use. By population category the reporting ratio ranged between 60% and 83%.
- By the reported data, nationwide library collection expenditure per electronic use averaged $0.94 as compared to $0.50 for collection expenditure per circulation. At least for now, spending on electronic re-

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	Library Name	State/ZIP		Population	HAPLR
Over 500,000 (76 Libraries in Category)	1. Denver Public Library	CO	80204	554,636	909
	2. Columbus Metropolitan Library	OH	43213	584,201	863
	3. Cuyahoga County Public Library	OH	44134	523,022	857
	4. Multnomah County Library	OR	97212	662,400	818
	5. Baltimore County Public Library	MD	21204	734,523	810
	6. Indianapolis—Marion County Public Library	IN	46077	832,693	791
	7. Salt Lake County Library System	UT	84121	682,620	791
	8. Montgomery County Public Libraries	MD	20850	873,341	764
	9. Hennepin County Library	MN	55305	735,050	759
	10. Fairfax County Public Library	VA	22035	1,003,099	737
250,000—499,999 (95 Libraries in Category)	1. Santa Clara County Library	CA	95112	404,200	884
	2. Johnson County Library	KS	66212	358,110	869
	3. Saint Charles City—County Library District	MO	63376	283,883	810
	4. Allen County Public Library	IN	46801	331,849	790
	5. Chesterfield County Public Library	VA	23832	259,903	773
	6. Dayton Metro Library	OH	46802	451,557	750
	7. Timberland Regional Library	WA	98501	410,039	749
	8. Pikes Peak Library District	CO	80901	473,320	742
	9. Toledo—Lucas County Public Library	OH	43624	455,054	738
	10. Anne Arundel County Public Library	MD	21401	489,656	735
100,000—249,999 (329 Libraries in Category)	1. Naperville Public Library	IL	60540	128,358	905
	2. Medina County District Library	OH	44256	118,090	890
	3. Douglas Public Library District	CO	80104	175,766	861
	4. Santa Clara City Library	CA	95051	104,600	860
	5. St. Joseph County Public Library	IN	46601	172,627	853
	6. Salt Lake City Public Library	UT	84111	181,743	840
	7. Central Rappahannock Regional Library	VA	22401	218,838	834
	8. Ramsey County Library	MN	55126	223,884	834
	9. Greene County Public Library	OH	45385	147,886	832
	10. Fort Collins Public Library	CO	80524	118,652	829
50,000—99,999 (541 Libraries in Category)	1. Lakewood Public Library	OH	44107	59,091	940
	2. Westerville Public Library	OH	43081	86,245	894
	3. Newton Free Library	MA	02459	83,829	890
	4. Carmel Clay Public Library	IN	47520	64,709	889
	5. Corvallis–Beton County Public Library	OR	97330	78,300	875
	6. Palatine Public Library District	IL	60067	89,950	874
	7. Wheaton Public Library	IL	60187	55,416	871
	8. Euclid Public Library	OH	44123	54,299	864
	9. Cleveland Heights–University Heights Public Library	OH	44118	65,868	862
	10. Upper Arlington Public Library	OH	43221	87,549	837
25,000—49,999 (911 Libraries in Category)	1. Washington—Centerville Public Library	OH	45459	45,932	924
	2. Elmhurst Public Library	IL	60126	42,762	908
	3. Lake Oswego Public Library	OR	97034	39,731	884
	4. James Prendergast Library	NY	14701	31,730	882
	5. Stow—Munroe Falls Public Library	OH	44224	34,630	877
	6. Westlake Porter Public Library	OH	44145	36,734	875
	7. Suffern Free Library	NY	10901	27,426	873
	8. Shaker Heights Public Library	OH	44120	40,766	872
	9. Wright Memorial Public Library	OH	45419	38,827	870
	10. Warsaw Community Public Library	IN	46580	25,262	868

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	Library Name	State/ZIP	Population	HAPLR
10,000—24,999 (1,764 Libraries in Category)	1. Twinsburg Public Library	OH 44087	24,891	935
	2. North Canton Public Library	OH 44720	22,632	914
	3. Brown Deer Public Library	WI 53223	12,153	911
	4. Wickliffe Public Library	OH 44092	21,548	909
	5. Hays Public Library	KS 67601	20,013	906
	6. Orrville Public Library	OH 44667	16,946	899
	7. Rocky River Public Library	OH 44116	20,678	895
	8. Darien Library	CT 06820	19,607	890
	9. Mackenzie Memorial Public Library	OH 44057	18,687	878
	10. Morse Institute Library	MA 01760	16,085	865
5,000—9,999 (1,441 Libraries in Category)	1. Bridgeport Public Library	WV 26330	6,739	921
	2. Freeport Community Library	ME 04032	7,800	894
	3. Redwood Falls Public Library	MN 56283	5,665	884
	4. Delphos Public Library	OH 45833	9,886	883
	5. Hartford City Public Library	IN 47348	6,928	879
	6. Cresco Public Library	IA 52136	6,385	874
	7. Bernardsville Public Library	NJ 07924	7,345	874
	8. New Cumberland Public Library	PA 17070	7,349	871
	9. Snow Library	MA 02642	6,341	865
	10. Williamson Free Public Library	NY 14589	6,777	862
2,500—4,999 (1,300 Libraries in Category)	1. Hagerstown—Jefferson Township Public Library	IN 46346	3,427	936
	2. Mentone Bell Memorial Library	IN 46539	3,678	929
	3. Falconer Public Library	NY 14733	2,540	929
	4. Desert Foothills Library	AZ 85331	3,728	899
	5. Tracy Memorial Library	NH 03257	4,116	895
	6. Matthias M. Hoffman Public Library	IA 52040	4,035	891
	7. Ewell Free Library	NY 14004	2,666	882
	8. Mt. Pleasant Public Library	UT 84647	2,707	882
	9. Vineyard Haven Public Library	MA 02568	3,755	878
	10. Morton County Library	KS 67950	3,496	874
1,000—2,499 (1,587 Libraries in Category)	1. Flomaton Public Library	AL 36441	1,588	900
	2. Chewelah Public Library	WA 99109	2,200	897
	3. Sodus Free Library	NY 14551	1,735	887
	4. Conrad Public Library	IA 50621	1,840	886
	5. Moose Lake Public Library	MN 55767	2,173	880
	6. Honey Brook Community Library	PA 19344	1,287	873
	7. Riceville Public Library	IA 50466	1,188	871
	8. Jessie F. Hallett Memorial Library	MN 56441	2,132	869
	9. Arapahoe Public Library	NE 68922	1,028	869
	10. Dike Public Library	IA 50624	1,729	861
Under 1,000 (958 Libraries in Category)	1. Poland Public Library	NY 13431	451	905
	2. Clayville Library Association	NY 13322	445	900
	3. New Woodstock Free Library	NY 13122	900	897
	4. Brunswick Public Library	NE 68720	179	860
	5. Silverton Public Library	CO 81433	531	857
	6. Elkton Community Library	SD 57026	677	851
	7. Chilmark Free Public Library	MA 02535	843	851
	8. Earlville Free Library	NY 13332	791	850
	9. Newfield Public Library	NY 14867	647	848
	10. Easton Library	NY 12834	230	846

sources appears less cost-effective than spending on traditional collections.

■ The average annual electronic use was about one per capita, although it varies widely by population category. The electronic resources rate is about the same rate as that for reference queries: about one electronic use for every four library visits and about one electronic use for every six circulations.

Building size

From time to time, HAPLR critics have noted that the ratings do not include measures of the size of library buildings. A library can rate very high yet be woefully undersized, they argue. That critique will persist until more states require this measure as part of their reporting for the FSCS dataset. When that happens, the question of how to incorporate building data into the rankings will remain.

Should the score for each library be based on whether or not it meets some percentage of the median for its population category? For example, if a library has high scores on all other measures in HAPLR but doesn't have at least 50% of the median number of square feet per capita, it fails a litmus test to be included in the top 10 ratings. Or should the number of square feet per capita be graded on a curve just like all the other measures? The litmus-test method seems preferable to grading on a curve when it comes to consideration of building size, but the data is not yet available.

NCES datasets

Bob Molyneux at the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) has recently developed the statistical database for public libraries and is making it available on the Web at www.nclis.gov/statsurv/NCES/.

Molyneux has combined the data collected on roughly 9,000 public libraries over the last dozen years in a variety of ways that will prove useful for those investigating trends in public library use and funding. The resulting datasets will provide us with a wealth of information. For example, those involved with ALA's newly established Allied Professional Association will want to know that:

■ Full-time-equivalent employee numbers rose 2.6% by 3,338 positions to 133,106 from 2000 to 2001.

■ From 2000 to 2001, total salaries rose nearly 7% to $3.9 billion, or an average of $29,437 per full-time-equivalent employee.

■ After adjusting for the added staff levels, that is a 4.2% growth in salaries.

Those interested in library finances will want to know that collection spending rose 7.3% in 2001 while noncollection spending rose 7.8%. Comparison to post-recession figures in 2002 and 2003 will be most instructive.

Those watching the devastating effects of state budget cuts on libraries nationally will be interested to note that state funds rose from 12.0% to 12.8% of library income from 1992 to 2001 while federal revenue fell from 1.0% to 0.6%.

Those concerned with electronic resources will note that from 1998 to 2001, terminals for the general public rose from 24,028 to 122,584, while staff-reported annual use of electronic resources rose from 20 million to almost 200 million. ❖

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The Impact of Imputation

Of 9,000 libraries, about 1,000 do not report annual visits and another 1,000 fail to report reference queries. The Federal-State Cooperative Service imputes its data; "imputing" means to guess using statistical principles. Libraries that still do not track visits and reference activities are strongly urged to do so. The failure to report includes libraries in all population categories. Even in the over-500,000 population category, 10 libraries do not report annual visits or annual reference queries. The imputation needed to adjust for their non-reporting takes time and effort, resulting in delays. Furthermore, the imputation of the library's data may be inaccurate.

An added problem this year is that the data for all Minnesota libraries was imputed: The state's budget crisis there resulted in such substantial staff reductions and uncertainties that none of the libraries' data was reported.

HAPLR History

The first survey in 1999 was based on data filed in 1997. This fifth one is based on data that libraries filed in 2002 on 2001 activities. The Federal-State Cooperative System compiles the annual reports as reported by state library agencies for nearly 9,000 libraries into a single dataset.

A fall 2001 edition of HAPLR had to be postponed and then abandoned because of delays in FSCS publication of the data. The data should have been available in the summer of 2001, allowing publication of HAPLR scores in the fall; but those results were delayed and not published until May 2002. The next dataset was then published just eight weeks later in July 2002. FSCS has indicated that it intends to publish the data in a more timely fashion from now on; that has proved true for this edition, which was published on time.